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S E C R E T VIENTIANE 000449

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS  
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PACOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/28/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [LA](#)  
SUBJECT: UNODC REPORTS SECURITY SITUATION IN NORTHERN LAOS  
WORSENING

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES MARY GRACE MCGEEHAN FOR  
REASON 1.4 (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The United Nations Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Representative in Vientiane, Mr. Leik Boonwaat, told NAS that, during his travel over the past few weeks, he had observed indications that the overall security situation in northern Laos was decaying. He said that a higher security posture was clearly evident along roads in the region, and that, in some cities, informal curfews were being imposed. One of the specific locations Mr. Boonwaat mentioned was within 70 kilometers of Vientiane, the national capital. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On May 29, during a lunch meeting, Leik Boonwaat asked the NAS about the May 24 Department Public Announcement about security concerns in Northern Laos. He then went on to share some observations he made during travel in northern Laos of the past several weeks. He stated that, while traveling to Udomxay and Phongsaly Provinces, he had noted a much more visible military presence along roads and a greater number of checkpoints. He also stated that, on at least one occasion, local officials had posted an "informal" curfew notice on the door of his guest house asking guests to remain inside during specified hours of darkness.

¶3. (C) Mr. Boonwaat said that, during a retreat hosted by UNODC in Thalath, Vientiane Province, approximately 25 security agents had been assigned for the protection of the UNODC delegation and Lao officials who stayed there overnight. He knew the number of security personnel because he had been asked to help pay for their refreshments. Thalath is a small town on the Nam Ngum River just below the Nam Ngum hydroelectric dam, approximately 84.3 kilometers by road, but less than 70 kilometers by air from Vientiane.

¶4. (S) NAS visited Udomxay briefly on May 19, but departed the city after only a two hour stay, and did not have the opportunity to observe any unusual security measures during hours of darkness. UNODC's report of enhanced security at Thalath is consistent with a NAS sighting of an armored vehicle moving north from Vientiane in the direction of Vang Vieng on the morning of April 4.

¶5. (C) Comment: Mr. Boonwaat is an Australian national with extensive UN service in Southeast Asia, including several years in Laos. His experience traveling in remote areas lends considerable credibility to his observations

with regard to changes in the security posture of Lao  
Government forces in the northern provinces.  
MCGEEHAN